

PROPOSED ADDITION TO THE "OFFICIAL LIST OF GENERIC NAMES
IN ZOOLOGY" OF "AHAETULLA" LINK, 1807, WITH "AHAETULLA
MYCTERIZANA" LINK, 1807, AS TYPE SPECIES (CLASS REPTILIA)

By JAY M. SAVAGE

(Department of Biology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles,
California, U.S.A.)

and

JAMES A. OLIVER

(New York Zoological Society, New York City, N.Y., U.S.A.)

(Commission's reference : Z.N.(S.) 772)

The principal object of the present application is to ask the International Commission to place the generic name *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807, on the *Official List of Generic Names in Zoology* with *Ahaetulla mycterizana* Link, 1807, as type species. A secondary purpose of the present application is to provide an opportunity for the selection of a lectotype for the nominal species *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus, 1758, and to ask the Commission to place the generic name *Leptophis* Bell, 1825, on the *Official List* with the above species as type species. The correct application of the generic name *Ahaetulla* Link and the name *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus has been the subject of considerable controversy, and, as we have most recently studied the problem (Oliver, 1948, *Bull. Amer. Mus. nat. Hist.* 92 : 167 ; Savage, 1952, *Bull. Chicago Acad. Sci.* 9(11) : 203), it seems appropriate for us to make application to the Commission for rulings stabilising the usage of these and allied names.

2. The snakes primarily involved in this discussion by virtue of their use as type species of genera are *Ahaetulla ahaetulla* (Linnaeus), *Ahaetulla cardolineata* (Gray) and *Dryophis nasutus* (Lacépède) of south-eastern Asia and *Thalerophis richardi* (Bory St. Vincent) of South America. These names are those adopted in the recent generic reviews by Malcom Smith (1943, *Fauna Brit. India* 3 : 241), and Oliver, (*loc. cit.*), and for the sake of clarity will be used in the following historical summary of the problems.

3. The following are the references for the names discussed in the present paper on which action of one kind or another is asked for from the Commission:—

Ahaetulla Link, 1807, *Beschr. Nat. Samml. Rostock.* (2) : 73

Ahaetulla Gray (J.E.), 1825, *Ann. Phil.* 26 : 208

- ahaetulla*, *Coluber*, Linnaeus, 1758, *Syst. Nat.* (ed. 10) 1 : 225
caudolineata, *Ahaetulla*, Gray (J.E.), [1834], *Ill. Ind. Zool.* (2) : pl. 81
Dendrelaphis Boulenger, 1890, *Faun. Brit. Ind.*, Rept. Batr. : 339
Dendrophis Boie, in Fitzinger, *Neue Classif. Rept.* : 29, 60
Dryinus Merrem, 1820, *Tent. Syst. Amph.* : 15, 136
Dryophis Dalman, 1823, *Anat. Ent.* : 7
Leptophis Bell, 1825, *Zool. J.* 2(7) : 322
nasutus, *Coluber*, Lacépède, 1789, *Quadr. Ovip.* 2 : 100
Passerita Gray (J.E.), 1825, *Ann. Phil.* 26 : 208
Tachyophis Mertens, 1834, *Arch. Naturgesch.* (N.F.) 3 : 197

4. In the case of two out of the three genera, the names of which it is proposed should now be placed on the *Official List of Generic Names in Zoology* the type species was determined by subsequent selection under Rule (g) in Article 30. The following are the references for the type selections so made :—

For *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807 : Meise & Hennig, 1932, *Zool. Anz.* 99 : 296

For *Leptophis* Bell, 1825 : Fitzinger, 1853, *Syst. Rept.* : 26

SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEMS

a. The name “*Coluber ahaetulla*” Linnaeus, 1758

5. When Linnaeus (1758, *loc. cit.*) described *Coluber ahaetulla* from “Asia America”, he presented no characters that would unequivocally diagnose the new form. Fortunately Lönnberg (1896, *Bihang. K. Svenska Vet.-Akad. Handl.* 22(4), 1 : 6, 26), and Andersson (1899, *Bihang. K. Svenska Vet.-Akad. Handl.* 24(4), 1 : 22) have shown that the Linnean material consisted of four examples of *Thalerophis richardi* from South America and one example of the Asiatic species which has been interpreted as *Ahaetulla ahaetulla* (Linnaeus). This material was mentioned under the name *C. ahaetulla* several times previous to the publication of the 10th Edition of the *Systema Naturae* (Linnaeus, 1745, 1748 and 1754). However, in the 10th Edition of the *Systema Naturae* Linnaeus gave the counts of only a single specimen, one of his examples of *Thalerophis richardi*. This appears to us to constitute a definite designation of a type specimen by Linnaeus as the original author, with the consequence of attaching the name *Coluber ahaetulla* to the South American species. All other workers have overlooked this virtual selection of a holotype by Linnaeus and as a result the name *Coluber ahaetulla* has been applied to both the South American snake later known as *Thalerophis richardi* and to the Asiatic species later known as *Ahaetulla ahaetulla* (Linnaeus). In order definitely to establish the name

Coluber ahaetulla Linnaeus as applicable to the South American species, we herewith select as the lectotype of this nominal species the specimen mentioned by Lönnerberg in 1896 (*Bihang K. svenska Vet.-Akad. Handl.* 22 (Afd. 4 (No. 1) : 5-6) as from *Donatio Caroli Gyllenborg*, 1744. This specimen is listed as Number 2 and has 162 ventrals and 152 subcaudals. The example is a member of the South American species.

6. The confusion regarding the correct application of the specific name *C. ahaetulla* is reflected by the number of generic names which have been used for it.

b. Generic names

7. As a result of the conclusion now submitted regarding the identity of *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus, the following synonymy summarizes the effects that the allocation has on the application of the effected generic names :

(I) South American

- (A) *Leptophis* Bell, 1825 (type species by selection by Fitzinger (1843) : *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus, 1758). Synonyms of *Leptophis* would be : *Ahaetulla* Gray, 1825 (type species by absolute tautonymy : *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus, 1758) ; *Dendrophis* H. Boie, 1826 (type species, by original designation : *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus, 1758) ; *Ahoetulla* Gray, 1831 (substitute name for *Leptophis* Bell ; takes same type species) ; *Thalerophis* Oliver, 1947 (type species by original designation : *Coluber richardi* Bory St. Vincent, 1823 = *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus, 1758).

(II) Asian

- (A) *Dendrelaphis* Boulenger, 1890 (type species by monotypy : *Ahaetulla caudolineata* Gray, 1834). *Tachyophis* Mertens, 1934 (type species by original designation : *Coluber pictus* Gmelin, 1789—*Coluber boiga* Lacépède, 1789) is a synonym of *Dendrelaphis*. *Tachyophis* Rochebrune, 1884, has already been used for a genus of fossil snakes and Merten's name is therefore a junior homonym and unavailable.
- (B) *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807 (type species by selection by Meise & Hennig (1932) : *Ahaetulla mycterizans* Link, 1807 = *Coluber nasütus* Lacépède, 1789). Synonyms are : *Dryinus* Merrem, 1820 type species, by selection by Gray (1825) *Coluber mycterizans* Linné, 1758 (a junior homonym of *Dryinus* Latreille, [1804], a name in the Class Insecta already placed on the *Official List* ; *Dryophis* Dalman, 1823, and *Passerita* Gray, 1825, are both substitute names for *Dryinus* Merrem and consequently take the same type species.

As listed above, *Leptophis* would now apply to those snakes called *Thalerophis* by Oliver (1948, *loc. cit.*), *Dendrelaphis* must refer to those snakes included in *Ahaetulla* by Smith (1943, *loc. cit.*) and *Ahaetulla* now includes the forms placed in *Dryophis* by Smith (1943).

8. The availability of the name *Coluber boiga* Lacépède, 1789 (*Quadr. Ovip.* 2 : 102) has, however, been questioned and there has been discussion also regarding the interpretation of this name. Malcolm Smith (1943, *loc. cit.*) argued that it was not a valid binominal name. Further, he argued that the reference of "Le Boiga" to *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus by Lacépède in a footnote should be interpreted as meaning that Link's *Ahaetulla fasciata* is the same as the *Coluber ahaetulla* of Linnaeus. On the basis of this argument Smith concluded that *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus, 1758, was the type species of the genus *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807, by absolute tautonymy. These contentions have recently been examined by Savage (1952, *loc. cit.*) who has shown that both are incorrect. On the first of these questions Savage has shown (: 204) that, in introducing the *boiga*, Lacépède followed the practice commonly adopted by French zoologists until well into the XIXth century of introducing new names simultaneously in two forms, the word selected for the name being printed first in Roman characters and second in italics. The first of these words represented the actual or proposed vernacular (French) name for the species in question, the second the Latin specific name proposed for it. In accordance with the same practice Lacépède, after having once used the generic name which he adopted for a group, did not always repeat that name when citing the names of species. This method of citing names would not be regarded as satisfactory today but it was widely used by French zoologists at the end of the XVIIIth and the beginning of the XIXth centuries and has always been accepted as constituting a valid publication of the names concerned. Any other view, if adopted, would cause the utmost confusion and widespread name-changing. The contention advanced by Smith in this matter must therefore be unquestioningly rejected. His second contention is equally unfounded, for it is not the case that Lacépède regarded his *Coluber boiga* as a mere substitute for *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus. On the contrary, he made it clear that, in his view, he was describing a new species based upon material examined personally by himself, for which he gave particulars of the number of ventrals and caudals, total length, tail length, and notes on the teeth, head and dorsal scales, and coloration. These matters are referred to here because it is essential to demonstrate the fallacy of Smith's argument that the type species of *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807, is *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus, 1758, by absolute tautonymy as a preliminary to the acceptance of the selection by Meise & Hennig (1932) of *Ahaetulla mycterizana* Link, 1807, as the type species of this genus.

9. None of the genera discussed in the present application has been taken as the type genus of a family-group taxon and in consequence no family-group-name problems arise for consideration.

Recommendations

10. The interpretations presented in the foregoing paragraphs appear to be the ones in closest agreement with the International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature. However, some technical arguments might be mustered against some of the points involved. It is for this reason that the International Commission is now asked to close this long controversy by giving an authoritative Ruling as to the manner in which the names concerned are to be used. The proposal now submitted to the Commission is that it should :—

- (1) direct that the nominal species *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus, 1758, be interpreted by reference to the lectotype selected in the present paper, namely the second of the South American Linnean specimens discussed by Lönnberg (1896) ;
- (2) place the under-mentioned generic names on the *Official List of Generic Names in Zoology* :—
 - (a) *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807 (gender : feminine) (type species, by selection by Meise & Hennig (1932) : *Ahaetulla mycterizana* Link, 1807) ;
 - (b) *Leptophis* Bell, 1825 (gender : masculine) (type species, by selection by Fitzinger (1843) : *Coluber ahaetulla* Linnaeus, 1758, as defined by the lectotype specified in (1) above) ;
 - (c) *Dendrelaphis* Boulenger, 1890 (gender : masculine) (type species, by monotypy : *Ahaetulla caudolineata* Gray (J.E.), 1834) ;
- (3) place the under-mentioned specific names on the *Official List of Specific Names in Zoology* :—
 - (a) *ahaetulla* Linnaeus, 1758, as published in the combination *Coluber ahaetulla* and as interpreted in (1) above (specific name of type species of *Leptophis* Bell, 1825) ;
 - (b) *caudolineata* Gray (J.E.), [1834], as published in the combination *Ahaetulla caudolineata* (specific name of type species of *Dendrelaphis* Boulenger, 1890) ;
 - (c) *nasutus* Lacépède, 1789, as published in the combination *Coluber nasutus* ;
- (4) place the under-mentioned generic names on the *Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Generic Names in Zoology* :—
 - (a) *Ahaetulla* Gray (J.E.), 1825 (a junior homonym of *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807) ;
 - (b) *Dendrophis* Boie (H.), 1826 (a junior objective synonym of *Leptophis* Bell, 1825) ;

- (c) *Tachyophis* Mertens, 1934 (a junior homonym of *Tachyophis* Rochebrune, 1884);
- (d) *Dryinus* Merrem, 1820 (a junior homonym of *Dryinus* Latreille, [1804], and a junior objective synonym of *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807);
- (e) *Dryophis* Dalman, 1823 (a junior objective synonym of *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807);
- (f) *Passerita* Gray (J.E.), 1825 (a junior objective synonym of *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807).